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Social aspects of palliative care are still important, 20 years on

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Background

- For more than 20 years, people who are dying, and their families or carers, have experienced isolation, exclusion from social circles and increased distance from their local communities (McLoughlin, et al., 2015)

Objectives

- This study aimed to establish an understanding of the current social needs of people in receipt of palliative care, living in their own home, how their social needs have changed due to advancing illness and how their needs are currently met..

Methods

- A qualitative design was devised using semi-structured interviews to explore and generate understanding. Purposeful sampling was used: participants were identified by staff employed by a hospice based in Northern Ireland.



Reference

McLoughlin, K., Rhatigan, J., McGilloway, S. et al. INSPIRE (INvestigating Social and Practical supportRts at the End of life): Pilot randomised trial of a community social and practical support intervention for adults with life-limiting illness. *BMC Palliat Care* 14, 65 (2015). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12904-015-0060-9>



Results

Seven one-to-one interviews were conducted over the course of the study. Findings show, 'social support', is an unfamiliar term which is broad and ambiguous. Types of support, how it is accessed and valued varied. Difficulties maintaining social contact were identified along with associated losses and a desire to avoid burdening others. Self-management strategies were used to help overcome barriers and coping through difficult times. Availability and accessibility of support when needed was important, along with a need for information and appropriate application for additional support when required



Conclusions

- Social support is varied and has specific individual meaning and weighting depending on a range of circumstances. In view of progressive financial restraints on services and societal changes there is a need for further research to inform needs assessment and establishment of the most appropriate mechanisms to meet the social support needs of those in receipt of palliative care.

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There are no Conflicts of Interest with regard to this study.